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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the development of Turkish Children and Mothers, a project designed to help 5-year-old preschoolers in the Ruhr Valley of Germany develop linguistic, motor, cognitive, and social abilities. The paper also describes various aspects of the project, including those that relate to maternal involvement, educational facilities, the needs of project participants, and cultural factors that should be considered when serving the ethnic Turkish minority that is adapting to German culture. Focusing on issues that arise from learning in a multicultural context, this paper provides numerous brief anecdotes to illustrate how cultural obstacles can be overcome. (Contains 49 marginal notes citing one or more references.) (MM)

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Multicultural approaches in education: a German experience

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Editorial history

This paper is a development of a speech on multicultural education delivered at a conference held by the European Forum for Child Welfare (EFCW) in Hamburg in April, 1992. (A full report of that meeting has been published by EFCW, Brussels).

The paper therefore represents the first statement in English about the experiences of this German project.

Carmen Treppte, the author, has written extensively about the project's work in German. In particular she has produced two books: *Lernen heisst auch Brucken bauen*, Weinheim/Basel (Beltz Verlag), 1990, and *Das Fremde als Spiegel. Kolportagen zur interkulturellen Entwirrung*, Weinheim/Basel (Beltz Verlag), 1992.

About the author

Carmen Treppte, though of German descent, grew up in Turkey. On her return to Germany she studied education and anthropology at the University of Marburg before, in 1981, developing her work in the field of multicultural education. She is currently co-ordinator of the project Turkish Children and Mothers based in a school in Gelsenkirchen, Germany.

The Turkish Children and Mothers project

Since 1985 the Bernard van Leer Foundation, together with the Freudenberg-Stiftung, has supported a project in Gelsenkirchen, Germany to focus on the needs of immigrant Turkish families, whose menfolk originally came to the country to work in the local coalmines and steel industry. Today, these mines are nearly all closed and the steel industry is in decline.

The project began by addressing the needs of the young children, who lacked any form of suitable or appropriate pre-school facilities, but since then it has developed a wide programme of activities that involve parents, provides skills training and parent education, with a strong commitment to advocacy for minority communities.

The project has never aimed simply to enable cultural minorities to become assimilated into the host society. It has repeatedly emphasised the need to sensitise and change the delivery of services, to make professionals more aware of the needs and perceptions of members of minority groups, and to draw attention to their special needs.

Bernard van Leer Foundation

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Carmen Treppte

Turkish Children and Mothers project
Gelsenkirchen, Germany

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Multicultural approaches in education: a German experience

Introduction

'If we hate, we lose. If we love, we become rich', Philomena Franz, a German Sintiza – a female member of the Sinti people, often wrongly referred to as 'gypsies' – writes in her autobiography.[1] It is a simple but powerful message, and it summarises in a few clear words the content of this paper.

The text is about learning in a multicultural context. It is not an outcome of academic research nor has it been composed in the tradition of armchair anthropology. It describes the development of a project which set off as an initiative in the field of pre-school education to improve opportunities for Turkish migrant children, without expecting them to accomplish a one sided process of assimilation. Hence the work of the project and its cooperating partners involved and affected a much wider range of people than the original 'target group', which accounts for the fact that in the following relatively little will be said about Turkish children.

The paper tries to define lessons learned from the past years of project life which might be of interest to a wider audience. While it was being written, a refugee camp was set on fire in Rostock, where onlookers applauded violent demonstrations of racism. Looking at today's newspapers, my thoughts drifted away which is how Philomena Franz came to introduce the paper in hand: she survived Auschwitz.

It seems rather presumptuous that these days a project in Germany should dare to talk about multiculturalism. In fact, its outcomes are by no means spectacular enough to make good headline material. And yet the effect it has had goes beyond the improvement of opportunities for Turkish migrant children in the narrow sense of the word. As a German father involved in the project once put it when talking to a journalist: 'What we try to do here is to live **together** in peace. No more and no less.'

Concepts of multiculturalism

When in 1744 white settlers in Virginia renewed their offer to receive a group of Native American children and educate them, the spokesman of the Iroquois nation firmly opposed the proposition, claiming that the first group of children they had sent to the white man's school came back to their tribe knowing all sorts of things except what was needed to survive in their traditional environment: they were useless as runners, unable to endure hunger and cold; they did not have the slightest idea how to build a hut and were completely

1. Franz, P. (1992) *Zwischen Liebe und Hass. Ein Zigeunerleben*, Freiburg/Basel/Wien, Herder, p 10.

unqualified for hunting. In short, they were absolutely hopeless. And yet, the spokesman went on, the Iroquois were basically willing to cooperate. To show their appreciation, they proposed that, for a change, the Virginian settlers should send a dozen of their youngsters to have them educated by the Iroquois.[2] Of course, the Virginian settlers never sent their sons.

Even today, over 200 years later, the anecdote sounds symptomatic of the problems children face when traditions and priorities of the home differ from those of the school. Symptomatic also of a multicultural situation in which one side has the power to impose its standards. If, however, pluralism exists without equality, ethnicity is likely to become a variable of social stratification.

Multicultural or intercultural education has for quite a long time been a topic of discussion among professionals who work with children of ethnic minorities. Recently, the concept of intercultural education in a multicultural society has been gaining a wider audience. For some of its advocates it is a priority to promote the development of a European spirit or to enable people to communicate in what they consider 'the global village'.[3] If it is true that we are affected by the consequences derived from conflicts, wars, or severe environmental problems no matter where in the world they take place, we have to develop a consciousness of the interdependence of events and relations. Even more so, we need skills that enable us to negotiate effectively across borders. To others, the approach seems to be a remedy for solving increasing conflicts concerning migrants and refugees in their 'host' society. If multicultural society is a political fact which we have to face whether we like it or not, strategies are needed to enable its members to come to an understanding with each other, regardless of their ethnic, national or religious background.

Often enough, however, concepts hiding behind an emphatic slogan lack a certain clarity. To some, multicultural education seems to be an additional subject that should be introduced to the school curriculum. To others it is rather a life style with underlying principles that can and should be implemented in any educational situation. Some approaches suffer from political naivety or turn out to bear a sophisticated hidden potential for the assimilation and political neutralisation of minority groups. Others are used by fundamentalist minority organisations and right wing majority groups alike to plead for segregation for the sake of maintenance of cultural identity.[4] Are we talking about an approach which aims at improving a minority's ability to meet the standards of the majority? Or are we also expecting the majority to reconsider its own presuppositions? Some who, in line with a post modern disposition, plead for overall cultural relativism, might easily get stuck considering seemingly culture bound values and behaviour patterns which are suspected of being incompatible with the achievements of the Enlightenment. 'Shouldn't there be limits?' some will say at this point 'Just think of the Rushdie affair! Don't we in fact need a certain amount of Eurocentrism? It's not that we like to be chauvinistic, but isn't ours the best of all possible, or at least existing, worlds?'[5]

In a book on cultural psychology Richard Shweder writes:

> One of the central myths of the modern period in the West is the idea that the opposition between religion-superstition-revelation and logic-science-rationality divides the world into then and now, them and us. According to this myth the world woke up and became good about three centuries ago when Enlightenment thinkers began to draw distinctions between things that pre-modern thinkers had managed to overlook.[6]

There is some ground for doubt indeed. Bearing in mind the domestication of European women and the colonisation of other peoples, it seems that Enlightenment was a limited agenda. Obviously, not everybody was meant to

2. Feest, C. (1976) *Das rote Amerika*, Wien, Europa Verlag, p 187 ff.

3. Samovar, L.A. & Porter, R.E. (1991) *Communication Between Cultures*, Belmont, Cal., Wadsworth, p 5.

4. Gill, D., Mayor, B. & Blair, M. (eds.) (1992) *Racism and Education*, London, Sage/Open University;

   Donald, J. & Rattansi, A. (eds.) (1992) *'Race', Culture and Difference*, London, Sage/Open University;

   Braham, P., Rattansi, A. & Skellington, R. (eds.) (1992) *Racism and Antiracism*, London, Sage/Open University.

5. for this discussion see: Webster, R. (1990) *A Brief History of Blasphemy*, Southwold, The Orwell Press; Ahmed, A.S. (1992) *Postmodernism and Islam*, London/New York, Routledge; Mernissi, F. (1992) *Die Angst vor der Moderne. Frauen und Männer zwischen Islam und Demokratie*, Hamburg/Zürich, Luchterhand

6. Shweder, R.A. (1991) *Thinking Through Cultures. Expeditions in Cultural Psychology*, Cambridge Mass./London, Harvard University Press, p 2.

gain from its achievements. To really accomplish distinct but equal status for everybody we have to reconsider our thinking and develop adequate strategies. At this stage, some practical experiences encountered in the microcosm of a project working with members of disadvantaged ethnic minorities might be of help.

The Turkish Children and Mothers project

The project Turkish Children and Mothers started in late 1985, supported by the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Freudenberg Stiftung. At present, it is also funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Municipality of Gelsenkirchen. In the course of the years, an additional programme for refugee families from Lebanon was set up with the support of the *Lindenstiftung für vorschulische Erziehung* (the Linden Foundation for pre-school education).

The project is located in Gelsenkirchen, a town in the industrial area of the Ruhr Valley in North Rhine-Westphalia. It is based in the premises of a primary school in a marginalised part of the town. The area is one of the few regions where coalmines are still operating, though the mine in the neighbourhood of the project might close down in the near future. During the 1960s coalminers were recruited from Zonguldak, a Turkish province on the Black Sea, where coal deposits were discovered in the 19th century. Today, the unemployment rate in this part of town is above average and dependence on social welfare is on the increase. More and more children come from broken families. The percentage of the non-German population is about twice as high as the town average. Deprived ethnic groups compete with one another for economic rewards, consequently, inter-ethnic conflicts are likely to occur. In areas like this, the lack of pre-school facilities for non-German and non-Christian children is a typical feature, thus minority children face almost certain failure when they enter school because they have had no preparation.

It was against this backdrop that the project came into being. The objective was the organisation of groups for five year old children to help them with linguistic, motoric and cognitive abilities, as well as social behaviour for one year before school entry. Taking as its starting point the situation of pre-school children, the project developed a varied set of community oriented activities in the course of the years, some of which are outlined below. Other activities included a two year home visiting programme on health and nutrition; work with refugees; work with second generation youth; and the production of toys and learning materials. Today, the project focuses on the dissemination of project experiences, while at the same time maintaining its community based programme.

The children

Five year old Ahmet is of Kurdish origin and was born in Lebanon during the civil war. After leaving Beirut to escape from the war, the family settled in a house near the school. It has Lebanese residents only, a Turkish mosque on the ground floor, a view of the railway line dividing the backyards of the houses in the area, and the coalmine right in front of the house. Most of the families living in the street come from Turkey, and have been observing the so called 'Arab invasion' with a frown ever since refugees started to move in. Even those – in both communities – who have never heard of the Ottoman Empire, or do not know that during the First World War Turks and Arabs fought against each other, are sure that 'the people over there are not our friends'. To the sparse German neighbours both communities look more or less the same.

In spite of this uninviting environment, and notwithstanding numerous problems with the administrative machinery of refugee custody, Ahmet's mother is happy

to live in a situation that to others might look scarcely favourable. At least, she says, there is no bombing and the children will go to school and get a good education. Though she has no school experience herself, she shows high respect for any kind of formal education that she believes will be of benefit to others. The teachers of her oldest daughter Samira, however, consider the mother indifferent to school affairs: a mother who, like so many others, is insensitive to what can be expected of cooperative parents who support their children in becoming school achievers.

Of this reputation, Samira's mother knows little. It never occurred to her that school achievement might be her business: she believes that professionals know better and that 'her sort doesn't have much of a chance anyway'. At the age of five, Ahmet does not speak a single word of German, and sophisticated play materials are not to be found in the house. To the family the best way to keep Ahmet quiet and soothe his temporary aggressive disposition is to let him watch his favourite 'Rambo' video as often as possible. 'All this blood, you know', his sister comments, 'it reminds him of back home in Lebanon'.

Mother involvement

All the children and parents involved in the project have specific stories to tell. Usually, however, a life history that fits West European middle class views of child development is not to be found in the group. More often than not the life styles – including the allocation of resources – of professionals like educators, social workers and teachers, and those of their clients are miles apart. Professional unawareness of this easily leads to what John Rennie called one of the 'educational ghosts':[7] the notion of incompetent parents not interested in the child's achievement and unwilling to cooperate. A misinterpretation that all too easily leads to mechanisms through which school tends to perpetuate inequality.

Four days a week, a group of pre-school children comes to the project together with their mothers to spend the morning with the educator, while older siblings meet in the afternoon for playgroups or to do their homework. Mother involvement is particularly emphasised by the project. In order to prevent alienation processes within the family, and to break the cycle of deprivation by increasing the mothers' support and competence for the benefit of their offspring, mothers are drawn into the work with the children. Thus the educator's behaviour does not remain a never ending mystery – 'The children are just playing. Why don't you teach them anything?'– but becomes an activity which is transparent, shows visible effects – 'How come she doesn't beat the children and yet they do what she wants?' – and can still be questioned without having to be afraid of sanctions – 'I do think our way to raise children is better. The German kids don't have any discipline, don't you think?'. Information is provided about the formal education system and specific topics of childcare are discussed in the group. Eventually, the mothers aquire the knowledge they need to fulfil their role as prime educators in perfect line with tradition. This is often difficult to cope with in a strange environment where traditional concepts of childcare might be no longer functional or may even be counter productive.

Mother involvement also encourages women to think for themselves by enabling them to identify their own needs, and make use of further education opportunities. Having lost the social net which in the village back home was provided by other women, often ill prepared for the dynamics of the nuclear family, and not knowing the language and the 'rules' of the host society, women often experience migration as a process of increasing seclusion. For many of the mothers the daily walk to the project is the first step to overcome isolation: 'I was a tombstone. Now I am beginning to live.' It is usually only after a period of strengthening their own self assurance that women are prepared to show any interest in work with their children. In the course of the years, a variety of

7. Rennie, J. (ed.) (1985), *British Community Schools. Four Case Studies*, London/ Philadelphia, The Falmer Press, p10.

courses have been established following the wishes advocated by the mothers. In the long run, a considerable number of women develop a self assertive attitude towards life, the outcomes of which will probably far exceed the immediate aims of the current project, and those of the school. Some manage to create more cooperative structures in their relationships, or gain mobility by taking their driving test. Some search for jobs. 'We have become important. Women who are important can achieve anything!'

This eventually also leads to an attitude change towards the achievements of their children. While in the beginning the drawings and other things the children had worked on were usually considered unimportant and therefore carelessly overlooked or thrown away immediately, today the little artists receive much admiration and their works are taken home and hung on the wall for others to see. It is only when mothers know that they themselves matter that they can encourage their children in developing self esteem.

The setting

The project's activities react to specific needs of ethnic minorities within the catchment zone of the cooperating school. The project, however, is not a hothouse to generate 'exotics', and activities are not meant to be exclusive. When the project started, the team looked for a base where a transfer of experiences to the formal system seemed feasible. After all, it did not make much sense to promote mother involvement for a whole year without having the prospect of longer term continuity once the children had entered school.

At that time, the school had just started to implement approaches of community education and intercultural education. In the beginning, however, there were no spectacular events, no headlines in the local paper. To begin with, communication structures and modes of cooperation among the teaching staff were developed and worked on. It was only after a basis of mutual consent had been established internally that the school reached out for the neighbourhood. At about this stage the project began trying to play a mediating role and to support the school in responding more adequately to the needs of Turkish children and their parents.

Once the children enter school, the educator cooperates with the first grade teacher in the classroom for the first months of school life. The transfer of project experiences has led to regular home visiting activities by the teachers and to mothers' meetings in the classroom. Organisational changes have taken place to improve the basis for parental involvement: working in shifts, most of the fathers find it difficult to dispose of their time freely, while most of the Turkish mothers would find it inappropriate to join an evening meeting. They will, however, show up in great numbers if invited at a time of the day more in line with their own values as well as with the rhythm of the family's everyday life. By and by, a bond of trust could be established on the basis of which parents and teachers started to perceive each other as cooperative partners.

To be distinct but equal

As a considerable number of German families in the school's catchment zone can also be regarded as marginal, it was important to establish a climate in which they would not feel excluded or disadvantaged by minority group oriented activities. Literacy courses, German language lessons, sewing and cooking groups, informal meetings and work parties set up for Turkish and Arab mothers by the project today are part of a community oriented programme that the school itself developed in the course of the years. Children can come back to school in the afternoon to do their homework, join a dance or music group, a

sports group, an art group and so on. They can borrow tapes and books in different languages, and they produce a newsletter. The youth board set up a day care centre.

Today, the school is a centre where, regardless of their ethnic, national or religious backgrounds, children and parents can contact others, take part in school life and find opportunities to learn. It was in the Mother and Child Group that Ahmet's mother slowly started to give up her conviction that she would never be able to learn for herself. At the same time Turkish mothers decided to reconsider their perception of 'those dirty Arabs'. And while Ahmet's mother still prefers to attend a weekly tea party of Arab women only, some of the others started to look to new horizons together with German mothers. They came to the conclusion that one can have a lot in common with people whose cultural background at first seems to be so very different from one's own. 'What do you mean, you organised a course concerning the functions of the female organs, contraceptives and all that for Turkish women? I raised three children, but I'm not very conscious of how I conceived them.'

The approach taken has not just widened the total range of activities usually going on in a school; it has had an impact on proceedings in the classroom. For example, on the way in which children are encouraged to refer to their cultural background as a resource for special skills, and on the way people involved in the process establish relations with each other. Consequently, changes have occurred concerning the exchange of experiences between members of different cultures as well as between parents and professionals.

In the beginning, there was no difficulty in defining the target group which was to profit from the process: Turkish children and mothers, of course; Lebanese families, possibly; a couple of German coalminers, perhaps ... Today we are not so sure. Once initiated, the process turned out to bring about changes and new perspectives for everybody involved: project staff, teachers, cleaning staff, the caretaker, partners working for other institutions, officials of the municipal authorities. In fact, all of us became learners, which for the project staff, as well as its partners, implied a growing awareness and modification of the professional role of teachers, social workers and educators.[8]

When trying to transform theory into action, the team had to face the fact that first of all it had to stop preaching and learn to listen carefully to what people had to say. Consequently, migrant and refugee mothers were not the only ones who underwent change and developed new skills, as they were not the only ones to question their most basic assumptions.

The occupational culture revisited

Personally, I never went to kindergarten and the only happy day of my school career I remember was the day I left for good, never to set foot into the institution again – at least, that's what I thought at the time. To me, school was an institution which was boring, depressing and incredibly out of touch with the everyday world of most of its consumers. It certainly did not feel good to be there. Today, I'm inclined to suspect that it tends to be a place not good to be in for a lot of teachers as well. In a way, this is arrogant and Eurocentric: you have to have access to resources first before deciding not to appreciate the way they operate.

Anyway, there are good reasons to question the formal system, its efficiency as a whole, and the impact it has on all those involved – and especially on the children of minority groups. Why cooperate with its agencies? To some it might appear that a project operating independently of the formal system would be easier to realise in many respects, being perhaps less dependent on the need to

8. Bernard van Leer Foundation, *The Parent as Prime Educator: Changing Patterns of Parenthood*. Fourth Western Hemisphere Seminar with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education, Republic of Peru, Lima, Peru 7-16 May 1986;

Bastiani, J. 'Ideology Versus Lay Experience' in Allen, G., Bastiani, J., Martin, I. & Richards, K. (eds.) (1987), *Community Education. An Agenda for Educational Refor*, Milton Keynes/Philadelphia, The Open University Press, pp. 175-192.

adjust and compromise. It would, however, make it next to impossible to influence how relations between children, parents and professionals are shaped outside the boundaries of a limited and protected area. Even taking into account the lack of pre-school facilities, the problem in our part of the world is not so much the absence of infrastructure as such, but the way in which existing services operate. For example, in the exclusion or discrimination of a considerable number of people who are supposed to benefit from its resources.

Literature regarding the impact that formal education has on members of disadvantaged groups provide abundant examples of how the system tends to perpetuate inequality, instead of realizing equal opportunities for all.[9] The more so for members of deprived ethnic groups.

Today, the project emphasises the dissemination and transfer of its experiences. Many of its addressees are part of the formal education system. Sensitisation to the needs and constraints of cultural minorities is an important aspect of its work. People do not have to deal with migrant or refugee children to face culture-bound conflicts related to hierarchical structures of power.

One of the cultural obstacles to conquer is that of professionalism. The formal education system is likely to perpetuate inequality as it tends to be middle class oriented in its messages and in the approaches taken. The same is true for a lot of the social services. Members of cultural minorities tend to be either perceived as a problem or as a group of people that has problems: they are associated with deficiency and deviance. With this background, counselling agencies and professionals in the field of education tend to label clients belonging to cultural minorities as pathological. Patterns of behaviour which are not in line with the counsellor's theory of what is adequate, are defined as unreasonable and inappropriate.[10]

At the end of a parent-teacher meeting at school, one of the teachers initiated a discussion on the effectiveness of the style of communication usually applied. 'Oh, there was this mother, you know. And I said, well, your daughter is weak in maths. You should practice with her. And the woman looked at me and said, "okay, I'll do it". And off she went. We always tell parents what we expect them to do but we never explain to them what could be the right way of doing it. And thinking of the mother, how could she possibly know what I was talking about?'

The tendency of professionals to display cultural arrogance can be intentional, often it is not. It can be based on consciously assuming that one knows better because of one's vocational background, often it isn't.

Once the school's process of becoming more open had been initiated, the professionals saw themselves confronted with a set of new situations demanding unforeseen and new skills. There was a decline in hierarchical structures and a changing attitude of parents, who showed an increasing tendency to no longer take for granted what professionals said, but to expect convincing arguments. It can be challenging not to be able to withdraw into hierarchical power structures when somebody holding less formal authority starts defending opinions different from one's own: 'I am the social worker and I am only doing my job. I clearly told the caretaker what I think of him. He has to submit to my agenda, doesn't he?'

To be confronted with new expectations can be frightening. Teachers were used to talking about children's progress in class, but felt insecure about how to react when parents started to discuss their family problems. Sometimes they felt it difficult to digest their newly gained insights into the living conditions of children and parents. Or they felt that the responsibility for unfamiliar topics was more than they could cope with. The process also brought about the necessity to exchange views and cooperate with colleagues in other fields of

9 Berger, P.L. & Berger, B., (1976) *Sociology: A Biographical Approach*, Harmondsworth etc, Penguin

10. Sue, D.W. & Sue, D. (1990) *Counselling the Culturally Different. Theory and Practice*, New York, J Wiley, p 11 ff.

work who were likely to look at a problem from a different angle and come to different conclusions.

The professionals' potential for cultural arrogance is high and by no means limited to people working within the formal system. It might be due to the quality of the vocational training they received, or to the degree of personal unconsciousness of one's own motives and capacities. Unfortunately, it is often reinforced by the necessity of constant self adulation and success seeking due to a lack in job security.

There are key questions that have to be discussed concerning professional self image and the resulting attitudes and behaviour. Why do I want to help? Do I want to show everybody how very clever I am? Am I striving for confirmation and approval? Do I promote dependency instead of facilitating the development of self reliance? Am I hiding behind the label of professionalism? Am I striving for power? Talking about the empowerment of disadvantaged groups, are we prepared to give up at least some of our own privileges?

People, whether professionals or not, are human beings and lack the potential for holiness and infallibility. They often have to work under a lot of pressure. Their ambition to realise nice sounding visions might be affected negatively by legal and bureaucratic restrictions, while at the same time they are expected to compensate for problems which are rooted elsewhere. Even a well functioning formal system pursuing innovative approaches is still a formal system and subject to specific limitations and structural constraints.

Still, there is a potential for change which might not only contribute to an increase in equal opportunities for disadvantaged children but also to the quality of life of professionals. They might find out – as was the case in this setting – that life is becoming not only more demanding but also more interesting. And also more satisfying as far as the quality of human relationships is concerned. Which means that we are not so much talking about how to make an otherwise perfect system a place which also works for children of ethnic minorities. We are talking about a school where people – adults and children, professionals and parents – like to be, feel accepted and can develop their resources.

Ingredients

There is a whole set of ingredients that the project's approach is based upon. A lot of them came into consciousness only in the course of the work. One aspect given priority is the question of how to operate in a multicultural setting and take into consideration the impact of culture bound influences.

'How do people recognise at first sight that in this building there are children and people of more than one cultural background?' is still a key question we often apply when entering a new multicultural setting. We also ask 'Are the people working in this building used to being greeted in passing, regardless of their nationality, job and social position?' Trite as these questions might sound, the specific answers they provide in a given context often hint significantly at the quality of the work and the climate in which it is effected.

Design of the premises

On entering the project's office, there will be little doubt about a certain affinity with the Near East. As a Turkish social worker once put it: 'When you leave home to live in another country, your identity is threatened easily. You're likely to lose your bearings. Whenever I feel lost, I come to sit in your office. It helps me to find the bits and pieces I lost on the way.'

Of course, the issue is more complex than it sounds. Pictures showing Anatolian village life might look rather exotic and out of place to Turkish visitors with urban backgrounds. The tapestry on the wall showing Mecca was highly appreciated by the Imam of the local mosque when he came for a visit; left wing intellectuals tend to be less sympathetic. Traditional costumes are admired as exceptional artifacts of skilled handiwork by some and rejected by others as symbols of the seclusion of Muslim women. Turkish women of the neighbourhood sometimes find it hard to understand the team's liking for traditional weaving: 'Oh that ... no need to make so much fuss about it. I used to do it when I was a young girl. I'm glad to see no more of it.' Visitors might wonder at the sight of 'ugly' plastic tablecloths in the mothers' room: but it's what the mothers considered a 'must' to provide efficiency as well as a comfortable atmosphere.

Of course, you don't need elaborate decorating material to start working. In addition, one might argue that our understanding of design is rather unscrupulous: there are a lot of different ways to have an affinity to the Near East and still feel comfortable in Western Europe. Of course, the arrival of the Lebanese refugees contributed to the design. In fact the decoration – and not only the decoration – is open for change; it does not necessarily have to stay 'oriental'.

Before the school in which the project is based changed its image – on the initiative of a new headmistress – there were signs on the walls telling parents they were not allowed to 'disturb' classes. At least they were bilingual. Apart from that, there was next to nothing to create an atmosphere in which children or adults from varying cultural backgrounds were likely to feel comfortable.

This has now changed considerably and there is quite some evidence that school has become a place where people feel at home. The decoration of the house reflects the various cultural backgrounds of the children, while at the same time brings into consciousness a much wider perspective: 'we are all children of this world.'

Need orientation

It was said that lack of pre-school facilities is a characteristic of the marginalised families with whom the project works. Of course, it's not the only facility that is lacking. It never rains but it pours. Once in contact with the project, people started to bring up all sorts of problems that they were facing: a husband spending most of the family income on drink; quarrels with neighbours; conflicts with official authorities; housing; unemployment; disablement; diseases; delinquency. The structure of a professional world in which life is split into distinct and sometimes rather absurd spheres of responsibility did not make much sense to the families. The attitude seems to be that 'If you're working in pre-school education, the older sister's problem at school is not your business, nor is the father's conflict with the foreign police.' However, if you want the families to trust you, you've got to react to their needs.

This is not to say the project tries to meet each and every expectation, thus absorbing its staff in trying to do everything. But it did feel the need to respond by establishing activities going beyond the promotion of the development of five year old children. And it did feel the need to contact the relevant organisations to cooperate, mediate and sensitise existing social services to the needs and expectations of cultural minorities. Again, this has nothing to do with 'Turks'. On starting to work with German parents, the school had similar experiences. In consequence, a process was initiated in the course of which other professionals who traditionally operate outside the school system were introduced into the building.

Given the background outlined above, you might have to start working from quite an unexpected angle in order to achieve your objectives: mothers will not share your priority of discussing issues of early childhood education as long as they don't know how to pay the electricity bill. There's no use discussing the value of mother involvement during a home visit as long as the father expects you to help him fill in some challenging forms he doesn't understand.

Access to information

Access to information can be vital to improve a marginal situation. A lot of women claim that before coming to the project they did not know whom to ask when there was a problem and where to go to get it solved. They found it difficult to support their children's chances of school achievement when they had no schooling themselves and, in addition, didn't know how the German school system works.

Again, you don't have to come from the Black Sea to lack access to information. When the project started to train mothers of first grade children on how to support them effectively in doing their homework, it was taken for granted that 'Turkish mothers need this kind of support'. It was only when, two years later, a teacher started working with German parents on the same issue that identical needs became apparent.

Access to information and provision of new skills is needed to develop efficient techniques of self help. We should, however, bear in mind that to perceive members of (cultural) minorities as deficient or deprived in the first place can be misleading. This approach, all too easily, tends to become a 'person-blame model'. [11]

Supply and demand

On visiting a community centre in another part of the country, we were told by the staff that 'As you know, working with Turkish mothers is very difficult, it's consuming, really. No matter what you do, they hardly ever respond. They definitely lack motivation.' The woman in charge had decided that in order to address Turkish mothers it would be a good idea to start a German language course. In the beginning, a couple of women showed up, but did not return as the course went on. On discussing the problem with the woman in charge, she claimed that **of course** Turkish women should learn German: 'Without any German it's impossible for them to find their way in society'. Unfortunately, the target group did not seem to share the professional's perception of this state of affairs.

When leaving the building, we met a group of Turkish women sitting on a bench near the playground watching their children play. 'Oh yes', one of them said, 'we know the house. I went a couple of times to learn German. But, you see, it was much too difficult. I mean, I'm illiterate, I don't even read and write Turkish. I found it impossible to follow the course.'

There is always a great potential to do the wrong things based on best intentions. The women in question might have decided that, before learning a foreign language, it would have made sense to be literate in their mother tongue. If only they had been asked.

It's always easier to advise other people on how to approach a problem adequately than to live up to elegantly verbalised standards oneself. When talking about responding sensitively to needs formulated by the families coming to the project instead of imposing our own standards, examples of

11. ibid., p21.

professional failure come to mind all too easily. How do you manage to perceive needs if they are put forward in a manner you're not familiar with? A Turkish woman might have formulated her wishes ages ago while you're still waiting for her to be what we appreciate as being outspoken: 'This is what I want!' You might be so absorbed developing concepts and general rules of procedure that you don't get the message if it doesn't fit the schedule. For years it was taken for granted that sewing courses were an adequate means for initial access to secluded Turkish women. I still fail to understand why in our project women never showed the slightest interest in sewing until literacy and language courses had long been established. Years later, the women decided they wanted to learn dressmaking.

Bargaining across borders

There is more to working in a multicultural setting than providing the means for a minority to adjust to the standards defined by somebody else. There are a whole lot of everyday situations in which it can be very important to take into account the cultural background of the people you work with if you want to be capable of acting. To give an example: when the project began, there was a group of German mothers who met once a week to chat and do needlework. At that time the relationship between Turks and Germans in the neighbourhood could be defined as somewhere between tense and non-existent. Based on some sort of commonsense logic – which they had hardly reflected on – the team decided to bring the two groups together: 'It's ridiculous that there should be a group of German women and a group of Turkish women meeting in the same house, on the same day, on the same floor, doing the same things and yet ignoring each other, isn't it?'

In those days, spending time in the project was still quite a new experience for the Turkish mothers which made them feel rather insecure. There were considerable tensions between the various subgroups, which varied in regional and ethnic descent as well as in life style, and a rather deep rooted feeling of being rejected by the host society.

The German group considered itself open-minded as it had integrated a participant of Turkish descent but of German nationality who took care not to display any kind of behaviour and attitudes that the German women could have labelled distinct or strange.

Both the German and the Turkish groups claimed that they had a general (rather abstract) interest in getting to know the other side, which today I think was mainly due to an attempt at being polite to professionals who always know better. The German group had been long established at school. In addition, its members were perceived as 'natives' by the Turkish women, who felt that for the time of the meeting they themselves were the guests, with the German women being considered as hosts. As usual, some of the German women had brought biscuits and put them on the table. And there they sat staring at each other. What on earth do you talk about in a situation like that?

Irritated, the German women decided to have their biscuits and cakes. The Turkish women gave them some sort of dramatic stare, accompanied by a solemn silence which made the German women eat even faster. When the meeting was over, the Turkish women declared they never ever wanted a repeat of that situation. They made a point of 'the Germans bringing their own biscuits and keeping them all for themselves'.

This was the limit, clear evidence of the utmost bad manners! And apart from that, a hidden symbol of rejection: 'They don't want us to be around. That's why!' The German group never came to understand the point. Of course

anybody can eat biscuits as long as there's something on the table. You don't make such a fuss about guests, asking them to help themselves before you think about taking something yourself. A Turkish woman would generally make sure that everybody else got their share first.

In the end, both sides had found considerable evidence for what they had known perfectly well beforehand: 'Germans' know that 'Turkish women' are suppressed, reserved, don't speak up in public and don't want to get into contact with other people. 'Turks' know that 'Germans' don't like Turks, are cold and egoistic and have no manners. The woman of Turkish descent holding a German passport was in a quandary, finding it impossible to mediate: the Turkish women at that time tended to compensate their feelings of inferiority by claiming to hold the monopoly on superior moral values, treating the outsider as a traitor of the Turkish nation. On the other hand, the latter found herself under strong pressure to adjust to the expectations of the German group if she wanted to be accepted.

The misinterpretations and mistakes which manifested themselves in the example are manifold:

1. staff did not behave in accordance with its own postulated theory of operating on the grounds of needs formulated by the community;
2. partners applied inadequate patterns to interpret the other group's behaviour;
3. misinterpretations tend to have a stronger and negative impact if the power structure between the groups involved is not symmetrical, or is influenced by negative previous experiences.[12]

Years later, the wish to contact 'the other side' was formulated by the women themselves. Today, the same kind of misunderstandings still occur but they don't have the same kind of impact as those involved have gained in self assurance.

In a multicultural setting, it is of little help to presume that everything will be easy as long as everybody behaves 'naturally' – which usually means 'the way I do'. Nor does it get you anywhere to assume that there is no relationship possible because 'those people are so very different'. You should learn to read the various codes involved to be able to adjust the expectations of either side. But how do you do it?

In a book on cross-cultural communication, Samovar and Porter define 'culture' as:

> ...the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe, and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving.[13]

In order to understand how culture might influence the thinking and perception of, and behaviour to other people, it can help to define building blocks and organise patterns of culture which bear a potential for different concepts and misunderstandings. These might include concepts of time and space, non verbal communication, styles of verbal communication, behaviour patterns and values. These items tend to be less specific to a certain culture than we might expect, and they often characterise the difference between industrialised and other societies. More often than not, industrialised societies operate on the basis of a linear, progress oriented world view. Other societies tend to operate on circular, organic patterns.[14]

Some of the crucial facets which are susceptible to misunderstandings are outlined below.

12. This mechanism comes across very vividly in: Forster, E.M. (1924) *A Passage to India*, London, Edward Arnold

13. Samovar, L.A. & Porter, R.E. *op cit*, p51.

14. In literature commonly used classification systems include polychronic vs. monochronic; low context vs. high context and socio-centric vs. egocentric.

    See: Hall, E.T. (1990) *The Silent Language*, New York, Anchor/Doubleday;

    Hall, E.T. (1989) *Beyond Culture*, New York, Anchor Doubleday;

    Hofstede, G. (1991) *Culture's Consequences. International Differences in Work Related Values*, Newbury Park etc, Sage;

    Harris, M. (1989) *Cows, Pigs, Wars, and Witches. The Riddles of Culture*, New York, Vintage Books;

    Foster, D.A. (1992) *Bargaining Across Borders. How to Negotiate Successfully Anywhere in the World*, New York, McGraw-Hill

Concept of time

When the project started, the cleaning staff found it rather difficult to adjust to the new situation. They were expected to leave the school door open. For years it had been closed in the afternoon. The cleaning staff felt embarrassed: 'We might get robbed'. They no longer controlled the situation: 'Anybody can pop in and out at any time'. The weekly afternoon tea party for Turkish women started at three o'clock. To the cleaning staff it seemed all too logical to open the door at five minutes to three and close the door about 10 minutes later. Any realistic estimation of the mothers' time of arrival would conclude something between two thirty and four thirty.

Week after week, Turkish women were locked out. Week after week, the cleaning staff was upset. Occasionally, the team was locked in for a change: 'You don't expect people to stay in an office after five, do you?' Things went on like that for about six months. We spent an incredible amount of time discussing the various aspects of opening hours with all parties involved.[15] The point is that, during these months, people involved in the process started to establish a relationship, getting to know each other and trying to see things from the other's point of view. By and by, the atmosphere changed. Today, the door is always open until at least six, while most of the Turkish women tend to be punctual in the German sense of the word.[16]

We should bear in mind, however, that sometimes differences in concept and behaviour do not so much indicate culture bound values of a certain ethnic group, but rather have to be regarded as characteristics of marginalisation. Lebanese women joining the weekly tea party proposed that, each week, one of them should be phoned by the teacher on the morning of the day they were expected to come. They argued that in the situation they live in – lacking perspectives, with nothing to do and nowhere to go – they find it difficult to remember the day of the week. It just doesn't make any difference whether it's Monday or Thursday. Of course, we take it for granted that our way of organising and define sequences of time is rational and the only possible way to do it. Yet, it is not.[17] There are cultures which developed different modes of organisation. From the example given above, however, one could hardly conclude that ignorance of weekdays were a Kurdish/Lebanese cultural trait.

Concept of space

Gender segregation is still valued by the community. In order to be able to come to the project, most women need to be sure the place is safe and decent. They tend to handle this rule rather flexibly, however, as long as the decision is left to them.

Among other examples concerning different concepts relating to space is that the distance between two persons which is considered adequate can vary from culture to culture. Cross-cultural communication counsellor E.T. Hall gives an example:

> Americans who have spent some time in Latin America without learning these space considerations make other adaptations, like barricading themselves behind their desks, using chairs and typewriter tables to keep the Latin American at what is to us a comfortable distance. The result is that the Latin American may even climb over the obstacles until he has reached a distance at which he can comfortably talk.[18]

Turkish and Arab women in the project might not go as far as to climb over obstacles. They do tend, however, to sit close to each other and to be quite

15 Maybe this process was similar to the kind of group consent Japanese businessmen are trying to achieve in their companies, while American managers spend their time complaining about how much time it takes to conclude business in the Far East.

16 It should be made clear that we are talking about an adjustment of expectations, not behaviour. Stereotyped adjustments to behaviour patterns can lead to complications. See Foster, D.A. *op cit*, p 34.

17 For examples see Wimmer, F. (1990) *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Geschichte und Theorie*. Bd. 1, Wien, Passagen Verlag, p 45 ff.

18 Hall, E.T. (1990) *op cit*, p 185; see also Sue, D.W. & Sue, D. *op cit*, p 53 ff.

expressive in their body language, touching each other or holding each other's hand. To German visitors this can be irritating, and sometimes is associated with obtrusiveness or disregard if they are exposed to the same kind of treatment.[19]

Non verbal communication

On visiting a Turkish family at home, a German female teacher seems to take a particular interest in the father. Sitting close to him, she looks in his face in a concentrated and affectionate way, trying to express general sympathy and willingness for cooperation on behalf of the child. As the father is the only family member who speaks German, she feels that it is easier to address him directly instead of the mother and having to rely on the bilingual colleague to translate what she wants to say. Coming from a cultural background which emphasises verbal skills, she might feel helpless in addressing the mother on the basis of non-verbal communication skills. In addition, she might be backed up by the misleading stereotype that in a Turkish family it's usually the men who take decisions.

Meanwhile, the mother recollects abounding stories of neighbourhood husbands having gone off with German women. As time goes by, the father gets this ambitious look in his eyes which should be reserved for female coffee house acquaintances – as he might not have had many other contacts with German women, there's little to correct his perception of the situation. The mother of the house has meanwhile left the room – the welcoming smile deep frozen – and is watching the teacher suspiciously from a distance.

Non-verbal communication is important, as it influences first impressions and helps us to judge the reliability and credibility of what is actually said. With the emphasis on verbalisation, we tend to underestimate the amount of non-verbal messages we send often without being aware of them and the impact they have.[20] In addition, the extent to which people express themselves by gestures and facial play can differ from culture to culture. Patterns of interpretation are just as likely to cause considerable, and sometimes incompatible, differences.

Communication styles

Being a Christian, a young Arab refugee once claimed I should be careful never to invite Muslims into my house – it being bad enough to work with them. 'You can't trust them, you know. No way.' he said. After having used all the rational arguments that I could think of, I let my fist fall on the table, yelling at the man that, for people of his thinking, there was no place in the house. This was by no means a cross-cultural communication strategy – I had simply lost my temper. The young man leaned back, giving me a big, affectionate 'you're part of the family' smile, and said: 'This was wonderful. Just like back home. I am happy, very happy indeed. This is the first time since I left my home country that I am having a serious conversation. When can we go on?' Two days later his friends arrived, having heard that here was a place where people could have a decent discussion about topics of general interest. Within a week, the young man went to see our Muslim colleague to invite him to his home.

European travellers in the Near East filled many pages labelling 'the Arabs' as the noisiest people on earth. Germans present during an Arab conversation easily mistake expression of emotions for liability to violence, thus coming to the conclusion that they are about to witness a fight. Again, the interpretation of different concepts of behaviour goes hand in hand with prejudice.

There are differences in interpreting volume and expressiveness, and also there may be differing attitudes concerning the display of emotions; the

19. A certain readiness of body contact between males and females, on the other hand, can be a misleading signal to Turkish people.

20. Samovar, L.A. & Porter, R.E. *op cit*, pp 175 ff.

priority of securing harmony; or the value of not provoking a situation in which the other is likely to lose face.[21] While Turkish partners might tend to think that Germans are rather rude and direct, the latter might develop a theory of their own about Turkish people never saying what they really think – in fact they do, but it may not be noticed. 'When dealing with a Turk, you never know where you are.'

In project life, the (German) professional's inclination to control the situation by pre-arranged agendas is likely to ensure failure. A lot of things might take place at the same time instead of one after the other as they should according to linear thinking. Clients might not share the professional's concept of a confidential counselling situation. People might not show up for a meeting at all, because they are having visitors. 'Why not tell them you have to go to a meeting?' the professional might grumble. Whereas to the clients, not to show up in a case like that is in perfect line with logic.[22]

Values and behaviour patterns

When training international managers to become cross-culturally skilled negotiators, D.A. Foster uses proverbs. Participants are asked to fill out a sentence starting with 'God helps those who ...' American participants usually write down '... help themselves.' Asian participants tend to add things like 'God helps those who help others'. Foster adds:

> I remember one gentleman from Thailand who refused to believe that Westerners really thought this way. 'After all', he said, 'how can you help others if you are only helping yourself?'[23]

We have a German equivalent of the American proverb and it is quite likely that Turkish or Arab participants in Foster's training courses would produce an answer similar to the one of the Asian colleague.

Of all the cultural differences concerning values, behaviour patterns and philosophies of life, the role of the individual – and phenomena linked to it – seems to be particularly crucial. Anything that seems to question individual liberty and the postulates of the Enlightenment tends to touch the very nerve of Western European and North American self image.[24] In international management encounters, conflicts arise when, during negotiations, North Americans proceed from the assumption of individual decision taking. Their Japanese counterparts value group orientation and, in addition, may insist on a process of establishing personal relationships before talking about business at all.[25]

What Germans might see as an unacceptable suppression of the individual's right to live up to his or her full potential of personal development, Turkish counterparts might see as a natural subordination of personal interests for the benefit of the family or community.[26]

In the course of a panel discussion with Arab women writers in Amsterdam, a European journalist described her frustrating experiences regarding the suppression of women's talents in the Near East. Luckily, she summarised, here they were, sitting around a table, with a small handful of Arab women who had 'made it': women who had managed to hold an independent position as self reliant and successful individuals. The Western European audience applauded, but the Arab women writers were far from being impressed. 'I'm definitely not to be reduced to the role of an independent individual!' one of them claimed repeatedly. 'I am what I am because of my people, and because of my family. And this I will never forget!'

21. Sue, D.W. & Sue, D. *op cit*, p 59.
22. Hall, E.T. (1989) *op cit*, p 213 ff.
23. Foster, D.A. *op cit*, p 60.
24. For examples see ibid., p 73 ff.; Sue, D.W. & Sue, D. *op cit*, p 39.
25. Foster, D.A. *op cit*, p 154 ff.
26. The clash between these concepts causes severe inter generational conflicts between parents and adolescents of Turkish descent who grow up in Western Europe.

Individual options

When we read about characteristics of 'the'-groups, we might easily feel misunderstood or personally ill treated when reference is made to the group to which we ourselves belong in terms of 'culture' or 'ethnicity'. Our reaction tends to be: 'This is not me or, at least, I am more than that.'

Books on cross-cultural communication have to generalise in order to be able to operate. At the same time, however, they usually make it very clear that whatever they say is to be understood as guidelines, tendencies, possibilities. Individual behaviour is not only influenced by culture-bound elements, but also by personal experiences and sub group membership. In addition, cultures are not isolated units, they constantly shift and change. Accordingly, the examples presented above relate to conflicts and misunderstandings that can happen, but by no means follow any inevitable law of nature.

During an in-service training session in a neigbouring town one of the teachers present asked: 'By the way, do you ever manage to diminish the suppression of Turkish women? I mean, headscarfs and all that?'

'What makes you think all Turkish women are suppressed?'

'Oh, come on, you can't fool me. I have a Turkish boy in my class. His mother is not even allowed to leave the house!'

'Did the woman tell you this is the way she feels?'

'What do you mean, did she tell me? You know very well they are not allowed to talk!'

To put theory into practice seems to be difficult. It is commonplace knowledge in the social sciences that we need generalisations to reduce complexity and make everyday life manageable. If, however, the generalisations are not open to change and challenge, they easily become stereotypes: 'impervious to logic and experience.'[27] In dealing with members of another culture, we tend to subsume them under a homogenous and often discriminating image of what we think 'these people are like'. Often enough, this is the best way to provoke exactly the kind of behaviour we expect. Not so much because this is what 'these people are like' but because we didn't give them a chance to show a different kind of behaviour. When it comes to dealing with disadvantaged minorities, their members more often than not are left with the choice between various alternatives of being deviant. What we deny them is, in fact, the right to display individuality which, among other things, seems to be a white monopoly.

Cross-cultural communication as an eye opener

The project does not aim at the establishment of a nostalgic variety of Turkestans. Its approach implies information about culture-bound values and behaviour patterns as well as a knowledge of political, social and economic forces on minority groups. It implies acceptance of differences without making children and parents 'hostages tied to a particular culture as a result of their ethnic origin'.[28] Cultures are changeable and permeable entities, and there has to be room for individual options in the dynamic between personal and social identity. Besides, we are not suggesting that everything is beautiful and has to be accepted just because it is a specific cultural trait. But it is only when people feel accepted instead of having their backs to the wall that they can develop the concept of potential change – to the extent they feel appropriate to their individual situation and at a speed they think they can cope with.

27. Sue, D.W. & Sue, D. *op cit*, p 47 ff.

28. CERI (1989) *One School, Many Cultures*. Paris, OECD Publications, p 21.

The outcome of multicultural education is often somewhat mysteriously described as an experience of mutual enrichment. This, however, does not mean an accumulation of folkloric artifacts such as exotic food and Turkish folk dance groups.[29] Everyday life in a multicultural situation also implies conflict and the search for conflict resolution, mediation and compromise. It is a process in which we can learn about the other, only if we are willing to learn more about ourselves. Based on dialogue, it can be 'an act of criticism and liberation, as well as of discovery'.[30]

But how do we get there?

If we want to support minorities, we have to work with the majority as well. And if we want to change other people's minds, there is good reason to take into account the probability of having to change a bit of oneself as well.

The intercultural perspective

In Germany, as in many other countries, it's natural that a taxi should have a taximeter, thus providing us with a sense of objectivity and reliability of the price we have to pay. Could it be any different? In Turkey a lot of the taxis do not have taximeters. In fact, there might be very good reasons to avoid one that has. Only a fool would assume the objective validity of a fair price, just because it is written somewhere.

How do you know the taximeter has not been manipulated? To newcomers, going by taxi in Turkey can be irritating. Most probably, however, they will be rewarded for their efforts. In Turkey, you don't just go by taxi. You establish a relationship with the driver.

Of course, I'm not suggesting that we should get rid of taximeters – though I do have a personal liking for going by taxi the Turkish way – I'm just trying to say there are different ways to reach a goal. A lot of them seem to be effective, at least in a given context.[31] And there might be good reasons to suggest that at least some – if not all – of them should be open to discussion.

Perception is not just a biological process. It implies socially learned skills and interpretation patterns. Usually, we take it for granted that things are the way we learned to see them and we tend to repress any evidence that other worlds might exist and, even worse, claim validity.[32] Our perception of 'otherness' of other people is often based on two principal models of procedure which:

1. deny or ignore the existence of cultural differences. 'We are all the same kind of people'; or
2. perceive differences as evidence of inferiority and deviance. Idealisation being the other side of the coin.[33]

What we need is to develop an intercultural perspective, that is to first accept the fact that values, attitudes, and modes of looking at life different to our own might exist, be significant and even effective.

To get to know one's own cultural baggage

What offends members of cultural minorities often is not so much that the other side shows wrong behaviour and is not sensitive to the do's and don'ts of their own cultural context. What really hurts is the negation of the minorities' everyday experience of having to question the validity of what they learned to be normal, adequate, logical, or valid. Or, as a Turkish father once put it: 'They don't even realise I'm trying to compromise. And in a situation like this, I don't

29. Parker, K. 'The Revelation of Caliban. The Black Presence in the Classroom' in Gill, D., Mayor, B. & Blair, M. (eds.), *op cit*, pp 284 302, p 297.

30. Shweder, R.A. *op cit*, p 110.

31. The application of one's own orientation can look rather absurd when applied in the context of another culture.

    See: Theroux, P., (1971) *Jungle Lovers*, London, Hamish Hamilton

    Ghosh, A. (1986) *The Circle of Reason*, London, Hamish Hamilton.

32. Hence the importance that Japanese life style has in publications on cross-cultural relations. Given the economic success of the country within capitalist business structures, evidently differing modes of social organisation, values and behaviour patterns cannot be so easily labelled inferior. They have to be coped with.

    See among others Wolferen van, K. (1990) *The Enigma of Japanese Power*, New York, Vintage Books; see also notes 14 and 48 in this paper.

33. T. Todorov's analysis of how Columbus organised his perception of the unknown provides vivid examples of how both strategies can be applied by the same person

    See chapter 1 in Todorov, T. (1982) *La conquête de l'Amérique. La question de l'autre*, Paris, Editions du Seuil.

mind if they hurt me. It's nearly inevitable; often enough, they don't mean it. If only just once they would **notice** that I have to act in contrast to my cultural baggage and that they constantly expect me to change.'

Long before the school started to initiate a dialogue between the churches and the mosque in the area, a group of Turkish women decided to take part in a Catholic church service. On coming out one of them said: 'You know, I never quite believed what people are saying about Christians. But now? I couldn't believe my ears! These folks **do** pray to three different gods at a time. It's really shocking, don't you think?'

To see oneself reflected in the mirror of another culture can be amusing as well as irritating. The embarrassment we are likely to feel in such moments can be a revelation and sensitise us to everyday communication patterns which constantly put members of ethnic minorities under pressure to defend or justify their 'strange, exotic customs'. Can we really be sure that our interpretation of other people's values or behaviour patterns is more adequate than the other way round? German project visitors tend to take it for granted that women who cover their hair are suppressed and those who don't are liberated. The women concerned sometimes feel hurt by the labelling process in which they don't have a say. Sometimes they just laugh whole heartedly. It might be helpful to bear in mind that, as Lawrence of Arabia wrote in his famous book, a lot of his Arab fellow combatants thought the British habit of wearing hats had to do with the sinful bearers' futile attempts to protect their guilty eyes from meeting the reproachful gaze of God.[34]

Intercultural relations can be irritating. Being based on dialogue, however, they offer vast opportunities for a self reflexive, open ended process in the course of which we can learn as much about ourselves as maybe about other cultures – 'However, understanding oneself and understanding others are closely related processes. To do one, you must start with the other, and vice versa.' [35]

Once, during a training session, a Turkish nurse complained about the priorities adopted by German experts discussing 'Turkish manners'. 'You're always talking about the 'Turks'. It's always us who have to explain, to justify, to question. Would anybody please try to explain to me "German culture" right now?'

In the end, after a journey halfway across the world, we might come back to face our own share of the story. When reflecting on how to develop skills for cross-cultural communication, we are not talking about accumulating as much information about the 'Turks', or whatever 'the'-group, as possible. We are talking above all about how to develop a deeper awareness of our own cultural baggage, its history of origin in a given context and the impact it has on our beliefs, modes of behaviour and expectations in relation to other people. In this respect, working in a multicultural context can be an eye opener[36], and eventually make us realise that 'The trouble I have with him is with me.'[37]

Knowledge about other cultures

When a black psychiatrist in the United States asked the National Institute of Mental Health to set up an institute or task force to study racism or white supremacy, he was told: '... we will set up an institute to study minority groups. In other words, "we won't study ourselves, but we will study you".'[38] It seems to be a commonly shared belief that the one sided accumulation of knowledge about minority groups is the appropriate step to take. And who else could be better prepared for that than Europeans looking back on a long tradition of exploring and evaluating other cultures?[39] We should not, however, abstain from the fact that this tradition belongs to the context of European expansion and colonisation of other peoples. More

34. Lawrence, T.E. (1962) *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Harmondsworth, Penguin

35. Hall, E.T. (1989) *op cit*, p 69.

36. ibid, p 212.

37. ibid, p 240;

    see Kristeva, J. (1988) *Etrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris, Libraire Arthème Feyard;

    Erdheim, M. (1982) *Das kollektive Unbewusst*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp.

38. Weinberg, M. 'A Historical Framework for Multicultural Education' in Cross, D.E., Baker, C.G. & Stiles, L.J. (eds.) (1977) *Teaching in a Multicultural Society. Perspectives and Professional Strategies.* New York/London, Collier/Macmillan, p 17.

39. CERI, *op cit*, p 17 ff.

often than not, our knowledge accumulated on the way is biased. Philosophers like Immanuel Kant, David Hume and many others believed in white supremacy; Victorian sage Thomas Carlyle wrote about what he called 'the Nigger', and went on to say that 'The Almighty Maker has appointed him to be a Servant'.[40] Images of the barbaric, lascivious and indolent Turk and Arab also prevail.[41] Consciously or not, we still cherish visions of the 'ever smiling sambo' and the 'ever dancing gypsy'.[42] Stereotypes of biased 'intercultural relationships' can be traced down to children's rhymes, adventure books, comics and other media we deal with in the course of our socialisation.

Members of other cultures might be regarded as exceptional athletes and good musicians. They might be admitted to having emotional qualities: generous, warm hearted, hospitable, but also violent, obtrusive, irrational. How much do we know about their cultural heritage, social institutions, politicians, scientists and artists? Do we ever take into account the possibility that we could learn from them, instead of the other way round? And is it really an exaggeration to think that even we, as professionals with our best intentions, sometimes tend to behave like an incarnation of Robinson Crusoe, trying to civilise the 'savage'?[43]

On this basis, additional information about a minority's cultural background tends to confirm preconceived notions rather than provoke a change of attitude on either side. The more so, since stereotyping does not allow a perception of the individual differences and of the strengths and resources that members of a given minority have to offer.

Members of different cultures don't meet in a vacuum. They have a past and a present to contend with and it is often characterised by a history of inequality in interrelationships. In this respect, multicultural education cannot be reduced to a one sided process of improving a minority's chances to adjust to a *status quo*. It is about changing white attitudes as well – perhaps more than anything else.

Looking for new perspectives

Due to one of the numerous surprises that social bureaucracy has ready for the innocent observer, the catchment zone of a day care centre was cleared of its marginal German population, the families having been given new housing in the course of a reintegration programme. Practically overnight, the German staff of the day care centre was confronted with a unique situation: there were people from all over the world who neither understood each other nor the educators. Describing her work, one of the staff said: 'You know, there is this family from Zaire. I mean, these people come right out of the bush. No civilisation, nothing! Luckily, I know some French, so there is at least some communication possible with the parents.'

Basically, the professionals were left alone, feeling they could neither cope with their own occupational roles nor with the problems of the families coming to the centre. One might wonder about the concept of civilisation presented in the example and how people manage to learn French in a place where there is nothing. Working at a growing awareness of learned racist attitudes, however, is one thing; the underlying structure in the situation described is another: in this example, interculturalism was programmed for failure. What happens in a multicultural everyday situation often is not a question of incompatible differences between human beings but the result of an unequal distribution of resources and inappropriate policies to cope with its effects.

Of course, a Turkish tea party does not put an end to restrictive legislation, and positive examples of refugee work at present are not a campaign issue.

40. Parker, K. *op cit*, p 290;

    see also: R. & G.Riepe (1992) *Du schwarz ich weiss. Bilder und Texte gegen den alltäglichen Rassismus*, Wuppertal, Peter Hammer Verlag.

41. Said, E.W. (1985) *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin;

    Kabbani, R. (1988) *Europe's Myths of the Orient*, London, Pandora;

    Schiffer, R. (1982) 'Turkey Romanticised. Images of the Turks' in *Early 19th Century English Travel Literature*, Bochum, Studioverlag Dr N Brpckmeyer;

    Mabro, J. (1991) *Veiled Half Truths. Western Travellers' Perceptions of Middle Eastern Women*, London/New York, T B Tauris.

42. Wiener, M. (1990) *Ikonographie des Wilden*, München, Trickster;

    Melber, H. (1992) *Der Weissheit letzter Schluss. Rassismus und kolonialer Blick*. Frankfurt/M, Brandes and Apsel;

    Theye, T. (Hrsg.) (1985), *Wir und die Wilden. Einblicke in eine kannibalische Beziehung*. Reinbek b, Hamburg, Rowohlt;

    Gilman, S.L. (1992) *Rasse, Sexualität und Seuche. Stereotype aus der Innenwelt der europäischen Kultur*. Reinbek b. Hamburg, Rowohlt;

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    Essed, P. (1990) *Everday Racism. Reports From Women of Two Cultures*, Claremont, CA, Hunter House;

    Pratt, M.L. (1992) *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London/New York, Routledge;

    Pearce, R.H. (1988) *Savagism and Civilisation. A Study of the Indian and the American Mind*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press;

    Inongo-vi-Makomé, (1990) *España y los negros africanos*, Barcelona, La Ilardel Libre;

    Calvo Buezas, T. (1990) *¿España racista? Voces payas sobre los gitanos*, Barcelona, Anthropos Editorial del Hombre;

    Kenrick, D. & Puxon, G. (1972) *The Destiny of Europe's Gypsies*, London, Chatto/Heinemann/Sussex University;

    Hohmann, J.S. (1988) *Geschichte der Zigeunerverfolgung in Deutschland*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus;

    Becker, J. (1977) *Alltäglicher Rassismus. Afro-amerikanische Rassenkonflikte im Kinder- und Jugendbuch der Bundesrepublik*, Frankfurt/New York, Campus.

43. Some people argue that minorities also stereotype other cultures, though they usually do not have the power to impose their views. The minorities do not have the resources to use their stereotyped images for power, or for the discrimination, exploitation, and extinction of others.

Practitioners in the field of education can hardly change structural causalities which have to be dealt with on a political and economical level. Instead, they might find themselves being misused for superficial treatment.

To be sensitive to cross-cultural communication skills is *en vogue*, for the most varied reasons. Advertising experts see to it that symbols, colours, and slogans employed in the presentation of their products should not become counter productive to the objectives of sales psychology.[44] International business managers participate in training courses to become cross-culturally skilled negotiators. This should sensitise us to the fact that underlying motives of those who speak in favor of the issue are not always entirely altruistic. Not without reason has the approach of multicultural education been called 'the latest and most liberal variant of the assimilationist perspective'.[45] The hidden dangers easily come into consciousness when we follow the dispute between multiculturalists and anti-racists.[46] Among other labels, the different means of understanding and putting into practice approaches of multicultural/intercultural education have been accused of being ineffective, idealistic, discriminatory, and even segregative by artificially maintaining boundaries.[47]

In fact, we tend to suspect that members of other cultures hide behind nebulous traits of everlasting strangeness. Often enough, in doing so we reproach them for holding onto communication obstacles we ourselves set up in the first place. Ever since Commodore Perry landed on the Japanese coast in the middle of the 19th century, the Japanese were labelled as being very different and difficult to understand. As they seemed to be reserved and withdrawn, most efforts to describe and analyze their 'national character' achieved little more than the stabilisation of their image of being incomprehensible: obviously, they didn't want to be understood. Strangely enough, early reports of travellers 250 years prior to Perry's arrival delivered quite a different picture. Looking at Perry's report of the mission, we find that on going ashore, the crew had received strict orders to listen carefully to anything they heard, but to give as little information as possible themselves. A few pages later, the same report complains about the Japanese being uncommunicative and evasive about the most simple things they were asked.[48]

When all is said and done, we're not so much talking about technical rules to facilitate intercultural acrobatics, but about how people come together in a given context, and what they can make of the situation they are in. People involved in the process of our project have experienced change. In living and working together, they came to achieve a greater awareness of themselves, a better understanding of other people and eventually enlarged their options.[49] The process, once started, is open ended: the development of, for instance, the mathematical sciences, or the *flamenco*, or the books of Hanif Kureishi and others gain their strength from the integration of many cultural facets. To be able to utilise distinctness as a potential for creativity, we have to realise that there is no such thing as 'the Turk' and 'the German'. To take into account the possibility of culture-bound differences is one thing. To insist on their existence, another. To declare them insurmountable, is ridiculous in argument, although it often results in fatal consequences.

44. Dülfer, E. (1991) *Internationales Management in unterschiedlichen Kulturbereichen*, München/Wien, Oldenbourg, p. 428 ff.

45. Troyna, B. 'Can You See the Join? An Historical Analysis of Multicultural and Antiracist Education Policies' in Gill, D., Mayor, B. & Blair, M. (eds.), *op cit*, 63-91, p 71.

46. see note 4; Finkielkraut, A. (1987) *La défaite de la pensé*, Paris, Editions Gallimard

47. For a general idea of the discussion see Rattansi, A. 'Changing the Subject? Racism, Culture and Education' in Donald, J. & Rattansi, A. (eds.), *op cit*, 11-48.

48. Singer, K. (1991) *Spiegel, Schwert und Edelstein. Strukturen des japanischen Lebens*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp, p 48;

    Barr, P. (1988) *The Coming of the Barbarians. A Story of Western Settlement in Japan 1853-1870*, Harmondsworth etc., Penguin;

    Benedict, R. (1991) *The Chrysanthemum and the Sword. Patterns of Japanese Culture*, Rutland/Tokyo, Charles E Tuttle;

    Collins, R.J. (1992) *Japan-Think, Ameri-Think. An Irreverent Guide to Understanding the Cultural Differences Between Us*, New York etc, Penguin;

    Doi, T. (1982) *Amae. Freiheit in Geborgenheit. Zur Struktur der japanischen Psyche*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp;

    Buruma, I. (1984) *A Japanese Mirror*, London, Jonathan Cape;

    Hijija-Kirschnereit, I. (1988) *Das Ende der Exotik. Zur japanischen Kultur und Gesellschaft der Gegenwart*, Frankfurt/M, Suhrkamp.

49. Other methods of presentation might have been more adequate to illustrate the process. However, this might have made it difficult to apply to different contextss. For further discussion see Geertz, C. (1973) *The Interpretation of Culture*, New York, Basic Books;

    Rabinow, P. (1977) *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*, Berkeley/Los Angeles, University of California Press;

    Clifford, J. & Marcus, G.E. (ed.) (1986) *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/ London, University of California Press.

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